FRIENDS OF FISHBOURNE ROMAN PALACE

NEWSLETTER

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Celebration Party

On 17 July more than 40 Staff, Volunteers and Friends assembled on the West Wing grass for a party to mark the 50th year since the discovery of the Palace during the laying of a water pipe. After a damp start the skies cleared and the evening was balmy. Tables, bearing the feast, were set out under the colonnade where we all ate and drank. It was easy to imagine the ancient inhabitants of the Palace spending similar pleasant evenings as they, like us, looked out over their garden.

Committee members provided two birthday cakes on behalf of the Friends and we all sang Happy Birthday to Fishbourne Roman Palace (a tricky feat, musically speaking). It seemed a shame to cut the icing photo-pictures, but the cake was delicious.

As the air turned cooler a happy group of people headed home. The Palace's golden anniversary had been well celebrated.

Pam Crowe

Fishbourne and the KTP

A KTP (Knowledge Transfer Partnership) is a government initiative which joins together businesses and universities. Fishbourne has been awarded a KTP linking the Roman Palace with Bournemouth University. It is supported financially by The Harbour Conservancy and also by us, the Friends of the Roman Palace.

A recent Bournemouth graduate with the requisite skills will be appointed to engage in paid work at the Palace for 40 weeks, working closely with staff to research major planning and redevelopment at the museum. He/she will test proposals and ideas against a variety of suggestions from visitors, curators, designers, schoolteachers and many other stakeholders.

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A day in the North Wing

A prim and proper teacher approaches the desk and asks "How long does your new film last?" "About twelve minutes", I reply. "Twelve minutes! – that's not much of a fag break!!" was the surprising response.

And so begins another day in the North Wing. We have by now learned to expect the unexpected. From the smartly dressed man who burst through the doors, declaring "Coach Driver – desperate! – toilets?" before being pointed in the right direction, to the child who asked "Is that a real live skeleton?" it's the visitors who make this such a fun place to work. They are always such a lovely lot of people, and the variety is wonderful. For example, a father of two children working at the Looking for Clues book, secretly bought them presents and gave them to Sylvia to hide behind the desk, so that she could give them to the children as their "reward". How lovely is that? Yet so many parents threaten to leave their children to be sold as slaves, that if it wasn't morally and legally wrong, we could have made a fortune at the auctions.

Visitors can be infuriating, however. You can guarantee that they will wait until you have put the admission through the till before telling you they are English Heritage members, making you start all over again. If only we had a pound for every time a senior joked that they were an Ancient Briton, our money worries would be over, and who knew that the Digger Driver from 1960 had so many relatives, and that they would all come to Fishbourne? Why do the people who arrive fifteen minutes before closing time always come from America or Australia and have to fly back the next morning, making you feel obliged to let them in, so that they can say they have "done" the Roman Palace? Why do people ask complicated questions of the guides just as they are due to go to lunch, and why do the schools decide to visit the shop all at the same time, (usually five minutes before their coach leaves)?

Despite all this, we think our visitors are great, and we tell them that whilst handing them a survey form to complete.

The children are unfailingly lovely, from cheeky to shy to grossly over-optimistic as to how much their £2 will buy. We will often put in ourselves the 5p (or so) that they have overspent, but I'm afraid we couldn't help the young lad who asked "What can I buy for free?" So, despite the seemingly endless task of retrieving dropped pencils/worksheets/just-purchased souvenirs/ shoes (yes really) from the mosaics, and even more unpleasant jobs when travel sickness strikes, we enjoy having the school children, and they all seem to enjoy their visit (especially the skeletons).

Peace reigns when they leave around 2.30, and we are left with our "normal" visitors. Now is the time to do the exciting jobs such as folding survey forms, writing exclusion dates on season tickets, putting vouchers into paper bags, pricing, labelling, and cleaning off sticky finger marks. Cashing up the tills and hoping they balance is a whole other story, and if Phil's hair hadn't been white before he started here, our accountancy would have done the job for him (thanks for your patience Phil). And at some point in the future, I can regale you with wonderful stories about Gift Aid. For now though, we look forward immensely to our afternoon tea (one normal, one black, one redbush and one de-caff please). We invariably dunk a restoring biscuit, and say "It's been a funny old day, hasn't it?"

Sheila Marsden and the North Wing team

Don't forget to visit the exhibition about the early digs at the Palace – it's on until December.

Chairman's Corner

Since taking office the members of your Committee have thrown themselves enthusiastically into exploring ways of supporting the Palace and providing Friends with opportunities to get together and learn more about Fishbourne Palace and other archaeological sites. I hope you have been able to come and enjoy some of the events we have organised for you this year. We are now discussing ideas for 2011.

As part of our endeavour we have redesigned our Friends leaflet which can be seen on the new display board located next to the exit to the garden from the North Wing reception area.

The temporary display board, on show during the Ermine Street Guard weekend at the beginning of May, attracted some interest as did the books we had on sale alongside. If you have any books about either Roman Britain or archaeology in general that you wish to part with, we would be grateful if you would pass them to us for sale in aid of Friends' funds.

The Committee have been busy finalising arrangements for the AGM which will be chaired by our President, David Rudkin. As is now customary, it will be preceded by a fascinating talk and a buffet lunch. We hope to see as many of you as possible on 13 November.

Pam Crowe

Director's chat

The main part of the summer season has now come to a close and I am delighted to say that we had great attendance numbers for August, always a good barometer for our final numbers at the end of this calendar year. We are also delighted to be so busy with many projects which are geared towards an exciting future, especially when we hear so much doom and gloom in our everyday lives! At Fishbourne Roman Palace it is all good news: we have been successful in our bid for a shorter Knowledge Transfer Partnership. I look forward to introducing the successful candidate to you all at the AGM when s/he will have already completed several weeks of the 40 week project to research and propose how we present and interpret our site in the future.

I am also very excited about our temporary exhibition, Ruins, Rotas and Romance, which showcases the faces and social history behind the 9 years of digging which unearthed our wonderful palace site back in the 1960s. If you get a chance, do please come along and reminisce with us.

I look forward, as always, to meeting as many as possible of you when come to visit us.

Christine Medlock

Double your money!

We need more members. We have enclosed a copy of the new recruitment leaflet with this Newsletter for you to pass on to someone you know who could be persuaded to join. If you can recruit someone, you will effectively have doubled the value of your subscription to the Friends – and of course, if you can, please recruit more than one!

We are distributing bundles of leaflets to likely sources of members in the local area, but if you think you could use some effectively please let us know. Otherwise please simply refer people to the website, where there is a downloadable version of the leaflet.

Thank you very much.

Anne de Potier, Membership Secretary

Fishbourne Roman Harbour Walk

Twenty-four Friends, led by our President, David Rudkin, former Director of the Palace, gathered on a sunny Saturday afternoon in July for a walk round the head of Fishbourne Creek. Before setting out, David explained, with the aid of slides, what we were to see and how it related to the Palace.

First stop was the Mill Pond (*left*), which he explained used to be far more extensive than it appears. It is fed by springs at the west end. Archaeological investigation by Major Hume Wallace in the 1970s revealed several large blocks from a stylobate (a continuous base supporting columns) and other artefacts including a horn comb. The columns might have formed a formal walkway round a ritual pool into which coins and other offerings were thrown.

The party then followed the footpath eastwards along the stream which marked the southern boundary of the original Palace site below the terraced garden, in which trial trenches were dug in the early 1980s. These revealed signs of a wall which might have enclosed fallow deer. Here David explained that a deep ditch, 12 metres wide and 2 deep, had channelled the stream to the harbour. As the Roman tide levels were much lower then they are today it was not clear how laden vessels had reached this point. David suggested that these boats might also have removed waste materials and deposited them on the fields, as numerous pieces of detritus were found in the area. In fact a keen-eyed member of the party spotted a piece of flue-tile lying on the bank.

Returning to the Mill Pond, the group then walked through the reed-beds on the west side of the creek to view the site of two buildings. The earlier, aligned east-west, is dated to c. 68 A.D and measured approximately 22 metres by 13. Above its charred remains there was once an aisled masonry building, 32m. by 16m and aligned north-south. It was excavated in 1982-3. Nothing remains of it on the surface except for traces of wall debris in the bank of a ditch.

Evidence for the lower Roman tide levels had been provided by the flooding of the site towards the end of the excavation. Presumably because of its proximity to the water and the consequent damp ground, the building had massive stone post pads acting as roof supports instead of post-holes. It also had a large platform of chalk on tile whose function was unclear. A corn-drier, hypocaust, several hearths, and small rooms at the north end were also found, plus a pile of Horsham stone tiles, which would not have been suitable for roofing but might have been used as wall-cladding.

The group looked across the creek towards Dell Quay which was for centuries Chichester's port, and is just north of Copperas Point where Roman tile-kilns were found.

Having returned to the Palace, everyone enjoyed an excellent cream tea prepared by Jill Christison and Anne Wingfield-Hayes. It was agreed that the whole afternoon had been enjoyable and interesting, thanks to David. Members who had hitherto visited the Palace only by road said how much better they now understood its position in relation to the harbour, from which it is now separated by modern buildings.

Anne Blakeney